

a corresponding flux from the ocean to the atmosphere. This effect might lessen or negate the benefits to stratospheric ozone from a reduction in anthropogenic emissions of methyl bromide.

In terms of costs to society from the ban, the California Department of Pesticide Regulation estimates growers in its state stand to lose \$340 million per year in crop damage. Duafala says no single alternative exists that will replicate the range of uses of methyl bromide. He says there are nematicides (1,3-dichloropropene) and fungicides (methyl isothiocyanate) that effectively perform some of the functions but that these are not as versatile as methyl bromide.

Bill Thomas, methyl bromide program coordinator for the EPA, agrees that there is no single alternative for methyl bromide, but asserts that the ban—phased in over a period of seven years—will allow for the development of alternatives. "The cost of finding alternatives is an issue, but not a monumental barrier," Thomas says.

Vets May Be Compensated

U.S. veterans suffering from Persian Gulf syndrome may soon be able to receive disability payments. The Clinton administration has endorsed a bill introduced by Congressman G.V. "Sonny" Montgomery (D-Mississippi) that would authorize payments to afflicted veterans for a three-year period.

"Persian Gulf syndrome" is the name given to an illness of unknown etiology that includes a broad range of symptoms such as diarrhea, muscle aches, and fatigue and affects perhaps thousands of Gulf War veterans (see Focus, p. 747). So far, researchers have not been able to pinpoint the cause of Persian Gulf syndrome, although many suspect chemical and biological warfare agents.

Veterans Affairs Secretary Jesse Brown called the proposal to compensate these veterans "unprecedented" because the government usually requires that payments be based on clearly defined illnesses that can be directly linked to active military service. "We left veterans of Vietnam hanging out there for 10 years," said Montgomery. "We cannot always wait on research."

Objections to the bill have already been raised. Senator John D. Rockefeller IV (D-West Virginia) said in a letter to Brown that the VA already has authority to compensate veterans for any "disability resulting from personal injury suffered or disease contracted in the line of duty." Proponents of the bill say that the VA has refused to invoke this authority.

"We simply have different interpretations," said VA spokesperson Jim Holley.

"It is our position that we need legislation to award compensation and that is a firm position."

To qualify for any disability benefits, a veteran has to be examined by the VA and found to be at least 10% disabled by the illness or injury. Montgomery's bill would set a one-year claim period. Compensation would depend on the extent of disability. According to Brown, a typical payment would be about \$166 per month, based on a veteran who is 20% disabled. The annual cost of compensation is estimated at \$45 million.

Congressman Lane Evans (D-Illinois) objects to the bill's three-year limit on benefits. Evans noted that the VA had never offered new benefits to veterans on a short-term basis. Brown said that if the government is unable to define Persian Gulf syndrome by the end of the third year, Congress should extend the benefits.

The United States is not the only country debating the health effects of the Gulf War. The Czechoslovakian military has claimed evidence of chemical discharges during the war. However, Great Britain's Surgeon General, Sir Peter Beale, said in a letter to the *British Medical Journal*, "We have no evidence to support the claim that a medical condition exists that is peculiar to those who served in the gulf conflict." Whatever the verdict, it is certain, as Brown said, that "The Persian Gulf was a dirty war, environmentally speaking."

Poland's Environmental Docs

One of the most important issues that has emerged during recent years in Poland is the shortage of sufficiently trained health professionals to deal with environmental health problems. In 1993, the Polish Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, in conjunction with the WHO European Centre for Environment and Health in Bilthoven, launched the Environmental Physician Scheme (EPS) to address this shortage.

The ultimate objective of the EPS is to create a network of environmental physicians that can provide public health facilities, government agencies, and scientific institutes in Poland with expertise on the health effects of pollution. The EPS is centered at the Institute of Occupational



Payment prescription. Persian Gulf veterans may soon be compensated for environmental war wounds.

Medicine and Environmental Health in Sosnowiec, Upper Silesia, where industrialization and urbanization have led to serious deterioration of the environment.

Recruitment of trainees began in spring 1993. From 102 applicants, 15 were selected to participate in the EPS. Trainees are enrolled in a three-year curriculum which began in January consisting of theory, practice, and individual research. The main body of the course is provided through the Institute of Occupational Medicine and Environmental Health, and lecturers have been invited from research institutes, universities, and government agencies in Poland and the Netherlands.

Courses in environmental health theory form the foundation of the curriculum. The theory portion of the curriculum was developed by Dutch experts on the basis of experience gained through environmental physician training in the Netherlands, where an environmental physician network has been in place for a number of years.

The practical segment is designed to gradually build skills in handling typical environmental health problems. An important aspect of this portion of the curriculum is training abroad. The goal of international training is to familiarize physicians with the methods other countries use to address environmental illnesses as well as to gain knowledge of the organization and legislation of environmental health services around the world.

The third part of training, individual research, is concentrated in the last semesters of the curriculum. The research will be based on practical application and guided by individual mentors. The individual research portion of the program gives trainees an opportunity to produce a doctoral thesis. According to Jerzy A. Sokal, director of the Institute of Occupational Medicine and Environmental Health, the planners of the program are hoping that it will help to establish the environmental